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PAK POLL PANEL REJECTS IMRAN'S NOMINATION PAPERS FOR 2 SEATS

In a blow to the former prime minister, his nomination papers for two national assembly seats in Punjab province were rejected on Saturday

ACTION OVER CONVICTION IN CORRUPTION CASE

The returning officers cited Imran's conviction in the Toshakhana case for rejecting his nomination papers. He was sentenced in the case in August, after which he was barred by the poll panel from contesting in elections for 5 years. Though his sentence in the case was suspended by the Islamabad High Court, the disqualification still stands, the returning officers were told

POLL BODY'S BIAS CLEAR, SAYS LAWYER

- Objections were also raised as the proposer and seconder for Imran's nomination did not belong to the respective constituencies
- Imran is seen as Pakistan's most popular leader. He has accused the establishment of wanting to keep him out of the elections. His lawyer said the rejection exposed the poll panel's bias

TWO

SEATS FOR WHICH IMRAN FILED NOMINATION PAPERS ARE LAHORE AND MIANWALI

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Gukesh joins Candidates, creates history

GOMESH S @ Chennai

THE sport has seen a resurgence ever since the Chess Olympiad was held in the country last year. With more and more success this year, the players have started embracing fame and earning a bit more money. The health of the sport that boasts of multiple World Championships winner Viswanathan Anand is looking up.

As the year 2023 bids goodbye, it is only poetic that the sport ends on a historic high. For the first time, three Indians will feature in the men's FIDE Candidates where top eight players feature to ensure a spot in the World Chess Championships. On Saturday, D Gukesh joined R Praggnanandhaa and Vidit Gujrathi in the Candidates. R Vaishali, Praggnanandhaa's sister is the fourth Indian in the women's section.

Sunday Special

"Relief" seemed to be the common refrain for both Gukesh's father Rajinikanth and GM Vishnu Prasanna. After days of trepidation and anxious wait, Gukesh has finally sealed the place for next year's event. It had come down to the wire for Gukesh, who won the Chennai Grand Masters recently. Anish Giri, who needed to win the World Rapid and Blitz Chess Championships in Uzbekistan failed.

"It's a big relief actually," Rajinikanth tells this daily from Uzbekistan. "Three months back, if you had asked, we were pretty much confident that he will make it because he had more than one option to qualify. It's been a tough two-three months, but it's fine now. Nothing comes easy at this level. So finally, once he got the spot, it's a bit of a relief, but it's not the end of the road. Now, the real competition starts."

Indeed, Gukesh had plummeted to the depths of despair in the last two-three months preceding Chennai win this month. After he surpassed Anand's Classical ELO mark at the World Cup, things went downhill. The pressure of qualifying for the Candidates was immense. He had almost given up this cycle. After the Grand Swiss event in October-November, he had to sit down with coach Prasanna and reflect on what went wrong. They decided that focus should not be on qualifying, but on playing good chess, and it worked. Gukesh went on to win the Chennai event, which put him closer to a Candidates berth. In Uzbekistan too, Gukesh did not have a great tournament.

"Winning in Chennai was very important. My biggest concern was this form always and, he was able to reverse that. So we can look forward, we can worry mainly about chess," said Prasanna with pride. P17

Chikkajala, now the most-polluted suburb of B'luru

BANSY KALAPPA @ Bengaluru

CHIKKAJALA on airport road has earned the dubious distinction of being the most-polluted place in the city with Suspended Particulate Matter (SPM) smaller than 10 microns recorded at an alarming 319.7, which is more than three times higher than the maximum limit of 100. Such levels have been rarely seen in Bengaluru.

A recent survey revealed that the SPM of less than 2.5 microns was also equally high at 74 where the maximum permissible limit is 60. The SPM was 618 and higher than the maximum permissible limit of 500, which is again very high and comparable to Delhi's pollution figures.

A report released on December 29 revealed that this concentration of SPM has led to many serious health problems in and around Chikkajala. Complaints of chronic breathlessness, bronchitis, asthma and other pulmonological issues have increased. Chikkajala, which is 24 km away from Vidhana Soudha, has now become the most polluted suburb of Bengaluru.

According to Shiva Analyticals, a certified agency, which conducted an ambient air quality check, the cause for the high amount of dust is the presence of more than 10 stone crushers in a radius of 3 km from Chikkajala. Such stone crushers are not allowed in residential areas as per zonal norms. A team from the agency conducted the ambient air quality sample study for 24 hours at Vidya Nagar Cross Road in Chikkajala on December 19.

After receiving several complaints of high pollution levels in Chikkajala, TNIE took up the matter with Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) chairman Shanth Thimmaiah. Accordingly, a mobile unit went to Chikkajala on December 4 and conducted an assessment of air quality. However, a report in this regard was not made available to TNIE. Repeated calls to KSPCB official Raghavendra, who conducted the survey, went unanswered. Even Thimmaiah gave no details of the survey. P2

Modi asks people to light *Ramjyotis* at home and celebrate consecration as Diwali

Avoid crowding in Ayodhya on Jan 22, urges PM

NAMITA BAJPAI @ Lucknow

APPEALING to people to light the *Ramjyoti* at home and celebrate the consecration of the idol of Ram Lalla in Ayodhya on January 22 as Diwali by lighting lamps, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday urged them to avoid thronging the town on that day so as to ease security stress and logistical management.

Addressing a public rally in Ayodhya, Modi said: "I am requesting all 140 crore countrymen with folded hands from this sacred land of Lord Ram to light the *Ramjyoti* in your houses and celebrate Diwali on the evening of January 22. The entire country should glitter on that day."

Preparations for the grand event have been going on for years and there should be no disruption on the consecration day, Modi said. "Don't crowd Ayodhya on January 22 as the temple will be there for centuries. The temple management should not have any trouble because of devotees. First, allow the consecration to take place. After January 23, you can come any time for darshan. You have waited for over 550 years. Please wait for some more time," he added.

The prime minister was in Ayodhya to inaugurate the Maharishi Valmiki International Airport and the renovated Ayodhya Dham railway junction besides laying the foundation for 46 projects worth ₹15,700 crore. He also flagged off two Amrit Bharat and six Vande Bharat trains.

Modi also urged the people of Ayodhya to make the temple town the cleanest in the country. "Ayodhya will now have to be prepared to host lakhs of visitors and their inflow will continue till eternity. The people of Ayodhya will have to take a pledge to make it the cleanest city in the country." He went on to issue a call to launch a week-long cleanliness drive across India in all the big and small temples from January 14 — Makarsankranti day — to January 21.

"Welcome Lord Ram's enthronement in his abode with a huge campaign of cleanliness at all the pilgrimages across the country from January 14-21," he said.

Later, Modi made a surprise visit to the house of Meera Manjhi, the 10th crore beneficiary of the free gas connection scheme, in Ayodhya.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi takes a tour of the redeveloped Ayodhya Dham Railway Junction in Ayodhya on Saturday | PTI

BABRI LITIGANT LINES UP TO SHOWER PETALS

Among those welcoming Modi in Ayodhya was Iqbal Ansari, a litigant in Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid land suit. "He (Modi) has come to our place. He is our guest and our Prime Minister," said Iqbal after showering rose petals on Modi's cavalcade as it passed the Paanji Tola area during his roadshow in the temple town

Vinesh leaves her awards on Kartavya Path

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Chennai

FOR wrestling the year ended on a sad note. Days after Vinesh Phogat announced that she has decided to return the Khel Ratna and Arjuna Award, she left the two trophies in the middle of Kartavya Path on Saturday. The multiple world championships medallist, like Bajrang Punia, was marching to the Prime Minister's office to hand over the awards but she was stopped by the Delhi Police.

Vinesh, who on Tuesday said she felt these awards were meaningless when wrestlers of the country are struggling to get justice. On X, she had posted a long letter addressed to the Prime Minister and said that she was returning the awards so that they do not become a burden on her from leading her life with dignity.

Vinesh along with Olympic medallists Bajrang and Sakshi Malik (Rio Olympics) have been protesting against former Wrestling Federation of India chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh since January. Bajrang returned his Padma Shri a day after Sakshi quit in protest after Brij Bhushan's loyalist Sanjay Singh was elected WFI chief.

Techie falls off 33rd floor flat, dies

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

A 27-year-old software engineer died after falling from the balcony of his friend's 33rd floor apartment at Bhattarahalli in KR Puram around 6.45 am on Friday.

The victim has been identified as Dipanshu Sharma, a resident of Kodigehalli. His father Chaman Sharma, a retired Indian Air Force officer, has filed a complaint in this regard.

It is said that the techie was partying with his friends when the incident happened.

The police are waiting for the postmortem report to ascertain if he was under the influence of alcohol or any substance.

Sharma was working with a software company in Whitefield. Sharma along with three others went to their friend's apartment at Bhattarahalli and from there to a pub in Indiranagar. From the pub, they visited a mall on Whitefield main road in Mahadevapura.

From there, they went to the apartment at Bhattarahalli, where they all reportedly partied. While dancing, the techie is said to have lost balance and fell off the balcony.

"We suspect that the victim must have been sitting on the side wall of the balcony when the incident occurred. His parents live at Horamavu. After he fell down, his friends shifted him to a hospital. The techie died of severe head injuries," the KR Puram police said.

KR Puram police have registered a case. Further investigations are on.

K'taka bans cleaning of school toilets by students

PURAN CHOUDHARY @ Bengaluru

THE state government has issued a circular warning schools against making students clean toilets on their premises.

FIRs will be filed against the heads of schools if found disobeying the government order, according to the circular issued on December 28.

The Department of School Education and Literacy (DSEL) said students should be engaged only in academic, sports and extracurricular activities. It is the duty of teachers and school development and monitoring committees to ensure that students are kept away from tasks such as cleaning toilets.

The circular also highlighted that the recent acts of children cleaning school toilets are objectionable and condemnable. The government has taken the matter seriously, it said.

The department has issued several guidelines to schools on keeping their toilets and urinals clean and in hygienic conditions. "Cleaning and maintaining toilets in government primary, secondary and high schools by students is strictly prohibited for any reason whatsoever," the circular stated.

Maintenance grants have already been released to schools and they should be utilised in phases in coordination with SDMCs. Failing to do so will result in disciplinary action against all stakeholders and FIRs will be filed against them, the DSEL warned in the circular.

MAINTENANCE GRANTS

Schools with 50 students: ₹20,000/year

Schools with 100 students: ₹28,000/year

Schools with 500 students: ₹33,000/year

Schools with more than 500 students: ₹45,000 /year

The circular said officials must monitor schools and make timely visits to them to check the washrooms for boys and girls. Toilets should not be locked during school hours.

In case of mistakes or negligence or if such cases recur, the jurisdictional field education officers and deputy directors (Administration) will be held responsible and disciplinary action taken against them as per the department rules," the circular stated.

SDMCs and principals have been asked to be careful and prevent such cases from happening in private-aided and unaided schools as well.

BJP MP Simha's brother held for felling 126 trees

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE forest department on Saturday arrested Vikram Simha, brother of BJP MP Pratap Simha, in Bengaluru in connection with a case registered against him for allegedly felling 126 trees without permission and smuggling the logs out of Nandagondanahalli village in Hassan district.

The department filed an FIR against him a week ago. After the case made headlines, Vikram Simha evaded the officials and avoided phone calls from the investigating officer.

Officials kept a close watch on him. With the help of electronic surveillance, Vikram Simha was traced to Bengaluru.

A special team, including officers from Bengaluru police, was formed to nab the accused. Vikram Simha has been taken to Belur for questioning.

Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre said, "The accused will be tried under the Tree Preservation Act as it is a crime to cut trees without obtaining permission. The local tahsildar brought the matter to light. This shows negligence on the part of forest officials. Five officers have been suspended on the charge of dereliction of duty and not following rules."

Dashcams in safari vehicles to help curb violations

BOSKY KHANNA @ Bengaluru

DASHCAMS are no longer limited to keeping a watch on unruly commuters in urban areas.

The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) will be making optimum use of this technology in all tiger reserves in the coming days.

All safari vehicles in the tiger reserves will be fitted with dashcams. The aim is to keep a watch on drivers and tourists and ensure rules are not violated.

A file photo of safari vehicles at Bandipur Tiger Reserve | EXPRESS

Sources in the ministry told *The New Indian Express* that the methodology was used and its success in Karnataka can be implemented across the country.

For the first time in the country, forest officials in Karnataka fitted three safari vehicles in BRT Tiger Reserve with such cameras as part of a pilot study launched three months ago.

BRT Tiger Reserve Director Deep J Contractor said the study was launched after some allegations from tourists and forest staffers. The exercise was found to be successful.

Initially, the cameras were fitted at the mobile charging points of the vehicles. But now, the vehicles have been modified so that the chargers of dashcams are fitted within the bonnets. This ensures proper communication, she said.

All vehicles of the forest department, Jungle Lodges and Resorts (JLR) and field staffers now have these cameras. The cost of each camera, including its installation, is Rs 10,000. P2

EXPRESS READ

PM flags off DK's first Vande Bharat to Goa

Mangaluru: Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged off Dakshina Kannada's first semi-high-speed train — Vande Bharat Express — between Mangaluru and Goa, from Ayodhya Dham railway station, UP, on Saturday. Now, people from Mangaluru can reach Mumbai in just 10 hours via Goa.

FM asks PSBs to focus on fraud prevention

New Delhi: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman asked public sector banks to focus on preventing large corporate frauds, wilful defaults and fraudulent activities targeting individual customers. She instructed banks to adopt advanced fraud prevention and detection mechanisms and educate customers about safe banking.